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ABSTRACT

Competent school administrators should keep up-to-date on areas of information relating to their field and might find useful the following 12 most important elements in a performance accountability code for school executives: strive for fair and equitable treatment of the staff; make competence and performance the key to promotion; make decisions without undue delay; be consistent and do not vacillate; delegate responsibility and support those to whom you delegate; be understood; keep your word; find time to show concern for misfortune, to commend excellence, and to offer encouragement during stress and difficulty; be warm and human and operate with the smallest possible ego; follow through and remember significant details; admit your errors; and hear all sides when a big decision is coming up. Perhaps the most crucial test of a superintendent.s competence today is his or her ability to resolve issues in the face of hostility ranging from innuendo to threats of physical violence. There are three steps that can be taken to cope with hostility. (Author/IRT)

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SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPETENCE IN 1976 *

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AS I THOUGHT ABOUT THE TOPIC OF MY ADDRESS TODAY — "SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPETENCE" -- I DECIDED TO SEE WHAT THE DICTIONARY SAYS THE WORD "COMPETENCE" MEANS. WHAT I FOUND WAS BOTH SURPRISING AND PROVOCATIVE.

ONE MEANING, THE ONE WITH WHICH WE ARE ALL FAMILIAR, IS "ABILITY; SKILL; FITNESS." BUT THAT IS THE SECOND MEANING. I WAS STRUCK BY THE FIRST MEANING, WHICH IS "SUFFICIENT MEANS FOR ONE'S NEEDS OR FOR A COMFORTABLE EXISTENCE."

EITHER I HAVE A DIFFERENT IDEA OF THE WORD THAN THE DICTIONARY MAKERS HAVE, OR I HAVE USED THE WRONG WORD. OR PERHAPS THE WORD HAS COME TO HAVE A MEANING DIFFERENT FROM WHAT IT HAD IN THE PAST. IN ANY CASE, WHAT BOTHERS ME MOST ABOUT THE FIRST DEFINITION IS THE IDEA THAT COMPETENCE EQUATES WITH COMFORT. IF IT DOES, THEN WE SURELY NEED SOMETHING MORE THAN MORE COMPETENCE IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION TODAY.

PERHAPS I SHOULD HAVE CHOSEN TO TALK ABOUT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION. BUT THERE ARE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS TOO, PARTICULARLY IN ITS CONNOTATIONS OF GREATNESS.

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HISTORIAN ALLAN NEVINS WROTE AN ARTICLE SOME YEARS AGO TITLED "IS HISTORY MADE BY HEROES?" HE TOLD ABOUT ONE WILLIAM LAUD, A HIGHLY UNPOPULAR 17TH CENTURY ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, WHO WAS PUT ON TRIAL FOR TREASON. LAUD WAS ABLE TO PROVE HIS INNOCENCE OF TREASON, BUT THEN HIS ACCUSERS SAID HE SHOULD BE PUT TO DEATH ANYWAY BECAUSE HE HAD COMMITTED SO MANY MINOR CRIMES THAT, ADDED TOGETHER, THEY AMOUNTED TO TREASON.

THE ARCHBISHOP WAS OUTRAGED. "THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE," HE ROARED, "THAT I EVER HEARD MEN DECLARE THAT 200 BLACK CATS MAKE ONE BLACK HORSE!"

THE ARCHBISHOP WAS BEHEADED, BUT HIS REMARK LIVES ON IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN BIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY. IN NEVIN'S WORDS:

> ANYONE CAN MAKE AN INTERESTING EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH TO HISTORY BY TAKING A VOLUME OF THE DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY AND READING SEVERAL HUNDRED PAGES. HE WILL QUICKLY PERCEIVE THAT, MUCH AS AMERICA HAS OWED TO ITS GREAT MEN, IT OWES INCOMPARABLY MORE TO A HOST OF USEFUL MEN WHO ACHIEVED A LESSER DISTINCTION. INDEED, ANY STUDENT OF HISTORY MUST BE TROUBLED BY THE DECEPTIVE LEGENDS THAT GATHER ABOUT A FEW TOWERING NAMES.

WHAT IS TRUE OF AMERICAN HISTORY IN GENERAL IS NO LESS TRUE OF THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN EDUCATION IN PARTICULAR. INDEED, THE SIN OF SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT MAY BE ESPECIALLY PREVALENT IN EDUCATION. ONE RESEARCHER SYSTEMATICALLY ANALYZED BIOGRAPHIES FOR AN INVESTIGATION INTO "THE GREAT MAN APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP." HE FOUND THAT THE NUMBER OF AUTOBIOGRAPHIES WAS STRIKING -- THAT "PEOPLE IN EDUCATION HAVE WRITTEN ABOUT THEMSELVES TO A DEGREE EQUAL TO IF NOT GREATER THAN THE AMOUNT OTHERS HAVE WRITTEN ABOUT THEM."

IN OVEREMPHASIZING THE SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE FEW, IN ANY FIELD OF ENDEAVOR, WE FAIL TO GIVE CREDIT TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF LESSER DISTINCTION WHOSE CONTRIBUTIONS PROBABLY ACCOUNT FOR NINETY-EIGHT PERCENT OF THE SUCCESS IN THAT AREA. THEREFORE, I CALL FOR THE EXERCISE OF SOMETHING PERHAPS LESS THAN GREAT LEADERSHIP BUT CERTAINLY MORE THAN MERE COMPETENCE BY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS.

BEFORE I GET INTO SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION, I WANT TO CALL ATTENTION BRIEFLY TO FOUR AREAS IN WHICH I THINK IT IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL THAT SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS KEEP THEMSELVES POSTED WITH THE MOST UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION.

FIRST, THE AREA OF ADMINISTRATION IS MUCH WIDER AND MUCH MORE COMPLEX TODAY THAN IT WAS WHEN I ENTERED THE FIELD OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION. TODAY'S SCHOOL EXECUTIVE MUST BE WELL VERSED IN EDUCATION LAW, THE RIGHTS OF PRIVACY, COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, AND MANY OTHER ISSUES WE DID NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT IN THE PAST. HOW MANY OF US ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE LANGUAGE OF THE FAMILY EDUCATION RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT OF 1974, FOR EXAMPLE? THIS ACT IS DIRECTED TO EVERY EDUCATION INSTITUTION RECEIVING FEDERAL MONEY, AND FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH IT MAY RESULT IN THE WITHHOLDING OF FEDERAL FUNDS.

SECOND, LEST WE OVERLOOK THE OBVIOUS, LET ME MENTION THAT INEXHAUSTABLE FOUNTAIN OF THE INFORMATION KNOWN AS CENSUS DATA. A GREAT DEAL OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE UNITED STATES IS TOLD IN THOSE FIGURES, AND IT IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS TO BE AWARE OF THE LATEST DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES.

THIRD, AS OUR EVER-INCREASING TECHNOLOGY CONTINUES TO SHRINK THE TIME ZONES OF THE WORLD, WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE OUR GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE AND ATTEMPT TO GAIN SOME UNDERSTANDING OF THE FORCES AT WORK BEYOND OUR BORDERS. IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO EQUIP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THAT WILL ENABLE THEM TO LIVE AS CITIZENS OF THE WORLD.

FOURTH, AGAIN PERHAPS OBVIOUSLY, I WANT TO EMPHASIZE THAT SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS MUST KEEP ABREAST OF GENUINELY NEW TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS OF TEACHING. THERE IS SUCH A THING AS FASHION IN LEARNING, JUST AS IN CLOTHES OR HAIR STYLES, BUT WE HAVE TO BE MORE CAREFUL THAN EVER TO AVOID SLICK HUCKSTERISM IN MARKETING EDUCATION. IT IS THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR'S JOB TO BE BOTH RESPONSIVE AND RESPONSIBLE IN SURVEYING NEW APPROACHES.

NOW LET ME TALK ABOUT SOME VERY SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES THAT I THINK CAN BE USEFUL TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS. THEY HAVE TO DO WITH PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY. HERE ARE THE TWELVE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENTS TO A PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY CODE FOR SCHOOL EXECUTIVES. I HAVE FOUND THESE TWELVE ITEMS TO BE IMPORTANT IN MY OWN CAREER AND IN THE CAREERS OF OTHERS:

1. STRIVE FOR FAIR AND EQUITABLE TREATMENT OF THE STAFF. BE CONSTANTLY CAREFUL ABOUT SHOWING FAVORITES AND FAVORITISM.

2. MAKE COMPETENCE AND PERFORMANCE THE KEY TO PROMOTION. MAKE SURE THAT THE OTHER ADMINISTRATORS IN THE SYSTEM FOLLOW THIS PRINCIPLE. IT IS EASY TO LOOK TO FRIENDS AND CLOSE ASSOCIATES WHEN A NEW APPOINTMENT IS ABOUT TO BE MADE. THE EMPHASIS UPON OBJECTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY SHOULD CARRY OVER INTO THE MATTER OF MAKING PROMOTIONS.

3. MAKE DECISIONS WITHOUT UNDUE DELAY. BE SURE THAT YOUR DECISION IS DEFENSIBLE AND THAT THERE IS A SOLID BASIS FOR IT, AND THEN ACT DECISIVELY:

4. Be consistent and do not vacillate. Show your ability to make decisions in the face of pressure. Be sure you are right, and then be firm. Leadership requires decisiveness. Vacillation and delay will destroy respect and erode leadership authority.

5. Delegate responsibility and support those to whom you delegate. Let others make decisions. Enhance their decision making capacity by giving the back-up and authority necessary for decision making. Be constantly cognizant of the decisions that you make and constantly delegate to unit heads that authority and responsibility that will ultimately make the unit more effective.

6. Be understood. Say what you mean, and mean what you say. Be direct, avoid wordiness, and make sure that your administrative pronouncements are unambiguous, concise, and straight to the point.

7. Keep your word. Do not overpromise. Don't "cry wolf." When you express concern or anger over a matter make sure that it is worthy of the emphasis it is getting. We are all just as small as the things we will let bother us. The chief executive must concern himself about large matters and should not "cry wolf" about small and inconsequential items not worthy of his stature or position. Commitments that are made must be kept. That is why it is important to keep your word and avoid over-promising. If the commitments of the chief executive are always matched by performance, a fine precedent for the entire institution will exist.

8. Find time to show concern for misfortune, to commend excellence, and to offer encouragement during stress and difficulty. This thoughtfulness will go a long way toward building the credibility and image of the chief executive officer. Often too little time is invested by the chief executive in offering encouragement and commendation. The chief executive should make sure that he takes the time to carry out this very important morale-building responsibility that is his and his alone.

9. Be warm and humane and operate with the smallest possible ego. Have a big heart and an open mind as you deal with your colleagues.

10. Follow through and remember significant details. Sort out the significant from the less significant and keep your mind filled only with the larger details and facts. Be sure to follow through and to perform in such a manner that others will know that you are going to follow through and check up on the conclusion or culmination of any substantive matter that occupies your attention.

11. Admit your errors. Admit them openly and forthrightly. Assume the full blame for your wrong decisions and don't take too much credit for the right ones.

12. Hear all sides when a big decision is coming up. Be sure to hear the views that are opposite from your own. Weigh evidence carefully and let it be known throughout your organization that you will listen to others and hear all sides before making a decision.

ANY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR WHO ACCEPTS THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEADERSHIP AND TAKES THE ACTIONS NECESSARY TO KEEP A SCHOOL SYSTEM ALIVE AND RESPONSIVE CAN BE CERTAIN TODAY THAT NO ACTION WILL GO UNCHALLENGED. AND AS OFTEN AS NOT THE CHALLENGE WILL BE PUBLIC, AGGRESSIVE, AND OVERTLY HOSTILE.

WE CAN DEPLORE CONFRONTATION, BUT THE FACT IS THAT "ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER" IS NOT IN GREAT DEMAND TODAY, AND IT IS NOT ENTIRELY IRRELEVANT THAT A BOOK CALLED "WINNING THROUGH INTIMIDATION" IS ON SOME BEST-SELLER LISTS. PERHAPS THE MOST CRUCIAL TEST OF A SUPERINTENDENT'S COMPETENCE TODAY IS HIS OR HER ABILITY TO RESOLVE ISSUES IN THE FACE OF HOSTILITY RANGING FROM INNUENDO TO THREATS OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE.

THE FIRST STEP IN MAKING PROGRESS IN A CONFRONTATION SITUATION IS TO ANTICIPATE IT — TO KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY WELL ENOUGH TO PREDICT WHICH SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP IS LIKELY TO REACT TO YOUR ACTION AND IN WHAT WAY. THIS, OF COURSE, MEANS THE ADMINISTRATOR MUST BE ABLE TO APPRAISE THE PROBABLE EFFECTS OF HIS OWN ACTIONS WITH A TRULY PROFESSIONAL DETACHMENT. IT IS DIFFICULT TO ADMIT THAT A CHANGE IN CURRICULUM OR THE CLOSING OF A SCHOOL REALLY DOES HURT SOME PEOPLE AFTER YOU HAVE DECIDED TO CHANGE IT OR CLOSE IT FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE WHOLE SYSTEM. TRUSTED ADVISORS ARE INVALUABLE TO AN ADMINISTRATOR SEEKING TO GAIN THIS OBJECTIVE VIEW OF HIS OWN ACTIONS.

SECONDLY, DO NOT ASSUME BECAUSE THE SITUATION IS HOSTILE AND COMBATIVE THAT THE OPPOSITION MUST BE VANQUISHED. THE IDEAL OUTCOME IS RECONCILIATION AND, IMPOSSIBLE AS IT MAY APPEAR AT TIMES, THAT DOOR MUST BE KEPT OPEN. A SPECIAL COOLNESS IS REQUIRED TO AVOID THE HASTY ACTION WHICH MIGHT QUIET THE OPPOSITION BUT LEAVE A FESTERING WOUND IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

THE PUBLIC CONFRONTATION FOCUSES THE ATTENTION OF THE COMMUNITY, AND IS OFTEN PLANNED FOR THAT PURPOSE. I HAVE OFTEN HEARD SUPERINTENDENTS COMPLAIN THAT THE NEWSPAPERS, TELEVISION, AND RADIO SEEM INTERESTED IN REPORTING ONLY TROUBLE, THAT THEY ARE NOT INTERESTED IN REPORTING THE GOOD AND CONSTRUCTIVE THINGS THE SCHOOLS ARE DOING. WHILE THIS MAY NOT BE COMPLETELY TRUE, CONFRONTATION DOES MAKE NEWS, AND HEADLINES ENCOURAGE MORE OF THE SAME.

IN A CONFRONTATION THE FOCUS IS NOT ONLY ON THE COMPLAINTS OF THE PROTESTERS, BUT ALSO ON THE RESPONSE OF THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION. IF YOUR CAUSE IS JUST, IF THERE IS A GENUINE COMMUNITY INTEREST AND EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE IN THE ACTION WHICH IS BEING PROTESTED, YOUR OPPONENTS MAY HAVE CREATED FOR YOU THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE THE COMMUNITY AWARE OF WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO DO. YOU MUST BE ABLE TO STATE YOUR CASE SUCCINCTLY AND FORCEFULLY, AND I WOULD ADVISE THAT YOU DO SO WITH UTTER CANDOR.

BROAD COMMUNITY SUPPORT IS THE ONLY DEFENSE AGAINST THE PRESSURES OF SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS, AND THAT SUPPORT REQUIRES FIRST AN INTEREST IN WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH AND THEN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ACTIONS YOU ARE TAKING. YOUR BEST CHANCE FOR GAINING SUPPORT MAY COME AND GO IN THE HEAT OF A CONFRONTATION.

ABOVE ALL, REMEMBER THAT, WHATEVER THE NATURE OF THE ATTACKS ON YOU PERSONALLY, YOU ARE FUNCTIONING AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMMUNITY AND ARE SEEN AS SUCH BY YOUR OPPONENTS. YOU MAY BECOME ANGRY, DEFENSIVE, AND EVEN DESPAIRING, BUT A PLAN OF ACTION WILL HELP YOU TO AVOID THE UNPRODUCTIVE ACTIONS THESE EMOTIONS MIGHT PROMPT. WORK CONSISTENTLY TOWARD BROAD COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT AND TOWARD A RECOGNITION BY THE PROTESTING GROUP OF ITS PART-INTEREST IN THE WELFARE OF THE WHOLE COMMUNITY.

WHILE I HAVE ADDRESSED MYSELF TO THE QUESTION OF HOW TO BE A GOOD SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR, ANOTHER AUDIENCE MIGHT ASK "WHY WOULD ANYONE SEEK SUCH A RESPONSIBILITY? " I CAN'T BEGIN TO TOUCH ON ALL THE REASONS, BUT I BELIEVE THE BEST EDUCATION ADMINISTRATOR IS A PERSON WHO THINKS EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT AND HAS STRONG VIEWS ON HOW THE GREAT RESOURCES OF A SCHOOL SYSTEM CAN BE MANAGED TO STIMULATE AND ENRICH THE LIVES OF STUDENTS -- A PERSON WHO HAS A PLAN.

AN EFFECTIVE PLAN IS NOT A FIXED STAR ON A DISTANT HORIZON, BUT A LIVELY AND CHANGING ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AND THE APPLICATION OF TIME, TALENT AND MATERIALS TO MEET THOSE NEEDS. A SCHOOL SYSTEM IS KEPT ALIVE AND EXCITING BY CONSISTENTLY EXAMINING WHAT IS BEING DONE, PLANNING HOW TO DO IT BETTER, IMPLEMENTING THE PLANS, AND MEASURING HOW WELL YOU HAVE SUCCEEDED.

THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL EXECUTIVE IS CONSTANTLY FUNCTIONING IN THE PLAN-IMPLEMENT-EVALUATE-REVISE CYCLE, AND THE ORGANIZATION WHICH PARTICIPATE IN THIS CYCLE IS CONSTANTLY RENEWED AND INVIGORATED. WITHOUT THIS PROBLEM-SOLVING AND ORGANIZATION-RENEWING ORIENTATION, THE SCHOOL SYSTEM WILL BECOME STALE AND ITS PROBLEMS WILL LINGER TO SMOTHER NEW INITIATIVES.

TO DELIBERATELY AND SYSTEMATICALLY SET IN MOTION A MECHANISM WHICH ASSURES THAT YOU WILL BE GRAPPLING WITH THE THORNIEST ISSUES IN EDUCATION TAKES CONFIDENCE AND GUTS. BUT IT IS ALSO THE SAFEST AND MOST CAUTIOUS PATH. THORNY ISSUES ARISE WHETHER AN ADMINISTRATOR CHOOSES TO CONFRONT THEM OR NOT AND, IF HE HAS NOT ESTABLISHED A SYSTEM TO EVALUATE AND SOLVE PROBLEMS WITH THE FULL RESOURCES OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AND THE SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNITY, HE MUST MEET CRISES ALONE AND UNPREPARED. THERE MAY BE A TRAGIC HEROISM IN SUCH A POSTURE, BUT IT IS NOT LEADERSHIP.

WE MAY BE ASKING A LOT OF OUR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS. THEY MUST BE SCHOLARLY AND PRACTICAL, HOLDERS OF BROAD VIEWS AND CONNOISSEURS OF ADMINISTRATIVE DETAIL, SOCIAL IDEALISTS AND PRACTICAL POLITICIANS, DECISIVE, PATIENT, EXACTING, FORGIVING, ARTICULATE, DIPLOMATIC.

WE ASK A LOT, BUT I DON'T BELIEVE IT IS TOO MUCH FOR THE MEN AND WOMEN IN WHOM SOCIETY PLACES SO GREAT A TRUST AS THE CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS OF OUR SCHOOL SYSTEMS.

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